

**Education Committee
Wednesday, March 15, 2023**

House Bill 6881: An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators - Support

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Maricar Geronimo and I am a resident of Groton. I work as a paraeducator in the Groton School District at Thames River Magnet School. I offer the following testimony in support of House Bill 6881: An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators:

Paraeducators are on the front lines of student learning. We provide one-on-one assistance to special education students, reinforce instruction, manage classrooms and support English language learners. We celebrate with our students when they succeed and try to redirect them when they act out verbally and physically. Despite the important roles we play, paraeducators are among the lowest paid staff members in our schools. We can't afford our healthcare and there is little chance we can afford to retire with dignity - unless we work a second or third job. We don't get paid during the summer and we can't collect unemployment. There is no wonder paraeducators are leaving the profession in droves, leaving more than 1,300 paraeducator positions vacant in districts throughout the state.

HB 6881 is an important step in improving the work life and career opportunities of Connecticut's paraeducators. But most of all this bill is an opportunity to begin to treat paraeducators with the respect and dignity we have earned.

On a daily basis, I work with two specially educated students at TRMS in the 4th grade. I am the only paraeducator working with students that are in the 4th grade. I have to balance my time between two students whose IEP's are completely different from one another, and this can be very challenging.

My work as a paraeducator is highly important. I truly believe that many children grow up in difficult home environments. I believe that situations at home cause a delay or even a restriction from children learning and adapting to society and children of their own grade levels. Although, I am unable to help what happens at home, I do my best at school to take it step by step and constant repetitiveness in hopes that my students will progress and improve into a daily routine.

I am a mother of two and both of my children attend TRMS. I have an eight year old son in 3rd grade and a five year old daughter in Kindergarten. As a mother, I can see that many students need

more guidance in life. I do my best to assist in helping with children's education and social skills in order to better prepare them for the future.

I am also a recent graduate of University of New Haven and obtained a Bachelor's of Science in Criminal Justice Concentration in Investigative Services. I do not choose to use my degree in my field, because I enjoy helping kids, especially at young ages.

I started as a Paraeducator in November of 2021 and my beginning rate was \$14.71/hour. It is now March of 2023 and my pay rate is \$15/hour.

The physical demands in the classroom are to guide my students with re-directed, re-reading, showing alternate ways of learning, communicating through de-escalating skills, demonstrating, problem solving skills, reporting to teachers, case managers, school psychologist, and administration. On a physical level, I must walk with my students, sit with them at their desks or on the class rug, kneel down at times, walk up and down stairs in our school, hold doors open, point with my hands and fingers, and obtain materials for students when they really fall behind.

As for our training, we continue to meet once a month during TLI days to complete PD Monster and Vector Training sessions. Teacher Learning Initiative (TLI) days come once a month, usually at the end of the month. Paraeducators will attend meetings with an instructor/administrator that will present PD Monster Training videos and Vector Training. PD Monster training gives strategies for Paraeducators to use to improve with helping students have successful experiences in education. Vector Training consists of giving Paraeducators the importances of Safety and Compliance, Special Education, Health, Social, Behavioral, and many more.

We meet at least once a month during Teacher Learning Initiative (TLI) days, which occurs once a month towards the end of the month. Some examples of what we discuss are learning strategies that can be used to help De-escalate students, reading Signs of Emotional Dysregulation, Implementing Trauma-informed Strategies, and learning about Unconscious Bias and Collaborating across Differences.

I am able to access my students' IEPs via Case Manager/Teacher, because it gives me the opportunity to learn about my students, help make plans or change plans, and work towards progress and improvement. Access to IEPs is important and coupled with the improvements in paraeducator involvement in PPTs outlined in HB 6881, I'll be better able to serve my students.

For the two teachers I have worked with, I have built great connections. I am always there for them with any assistance they need within the classroom. I always communicate on a daily basis about planning and strategies that can be used to make it a successful day.

I believe that Paraeducators deserve to be paid more for the work we do. This job takes a big toll on our emotions as human beings, along with teachers. It is very stressful trying to keep up with helping all we can. Our agendas may be to work specifically with certain students, but we will never deny any other student who needs help.

I am proud to be a paraeducator because I know I have made a difference. I build connections with my students, many come to me for any help they need, whether it be academically, helping tie their shoes, fixing something, accompanying them during activities, overall just being there for them. This process shows these kids that I can be trusted.

I urge every member of the committee to support House Bill 6881.

Maricar Geronimo
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